CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 22 January 1998, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Norberg (Sweden)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 780th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, on behalf of all of us, I should like to extend a warm welcome to the new representative of Viet Nam, Ambassador Nguyen Quy Binh, an assure him of our cooperation and support.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Japan, Canada, Egypt, Belgium, Ireland and Mexico.

Before giving the floor to the first speaker, I should like to remind you that we shall hold informal open-ended consultations immediately followin this plenary meeting.

I now invite the representative of Japan, Ambassador Hayashi, to take the floor.

Mr. HAYASHI (Japan): At the outset, please allow me to congratulate you, Ambassador Norberg, on your assumption of the high post of the presidenc of the Conference on Disarmament at this important juncture. It is said that the early stage of the Conference's annual session is always difficult. It may be true especially this year. I am fully confident, however, that, under your wise guidance based on your long and rich experience here, the Conferenc will overcome difficulties and find its way to meet the tasks entrusted by th international community. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you lead the work of the Conference. Our greetings are also extended to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and to the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail.

I would like to express further my heartfelt gratitude for the kind words and warm welcome addressed to me by the President and by my colleagues

Since this is my very first time to take the floor as the representative of Japan to this distinguished Conference, I would like to express my persona gratification to be here and to work with such admirable diplomats for such a important cause, that is to say, the advancement of global disarmament. Our predecessors said that the CD is the best club in town. It has been the case to date, and hopefully it will continue to be so. However, as those predecessors also said, the fame of the Conference does not depend on how muc money we spend in the restaurants around here, but it depends on what the Conference does as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make this Conference what we can be proud of not only in this town of Geneva, but also in the whole international society.

The most important recipe to maintain the credit of this Conference would be to avoid the repetition of what happened last year. Each delegation needs to address itself to the Conference with a fresh spirit of cooperation. In this context, it is indeed an encouraging sign that we agreed on the

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Conference's agenda at the outset of the annual session this year. Taking advantage of this good and smooth start, we must proceed to substantive work as soon as possible.

Among potential subjects for substantive negotiations, Japan attaches importance to such issues as a fissile material cut-off treaty as a means of promoting nuclear disarmament and anti-personnel landmines.

Nuclear disarmament is Japan's invariable priority in disarmament. Let me recall that my delegation put forward a proposal last year to appoint a special coordinator on nuclear disarmament in order to identify issues which could be negotiated in the Conference. We do not stick to a specific format of how we pursue nuclear disarmament in the CD. We are open to a special coordinator, an ad hoc committee or any other mechanisms, but it is Japan's firm belief that the CD itself should make its own effort to identify possible items in the field of nuclear disarmament to be negotiated in the Conference. In this respect, my delegation welcomes very much the concrete proposal made by South Africa for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. It is now time for us to seriously consider the possible way in which nuclear disarmament is most adequately dealt with in the CD. In the meantime, it would be useful if nuclear-weapon States inform the Conference of the progress or efforts made in the process of nuclear disarmament. My delegation also notes the importance of the safe and effective management of fissile materials derived from the process of the dismantlement of nuclear weapons, as reflected in United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/38 K.

There are a number of important measures in nuclear disarmament. A cut-off treaty, however, is the only item already identified and agreed upon as a subject for negotiations in the CD. That is why Japan continues to hold the view that an FMCT is the next practical item for negotiations after the CTBT in the context of nuclear disarmament. That is why Japan supports the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee based on the Shannon mandate of 1995. We sincerely hope that our wish will come true this year thanks to the spirit of cooperation in the Conference.

If it will facilitate the discussions on this issue to reach an agreement, my delegation is delighted to make a contribution. If appropriate, we would propose to put an FMCT more in the context of nuclear disarmament but, at the same time, without being bound by the time-bound framework; or, in case agreement cannot be reached on commencing the negotiations, we would suggest starting some discussions on the technical aspects of a treaty together with experts. My delegation is now examining the desirability of concrete proposals, and we would table them when it is appropriate to do so.

Let me now touch upon the issue of anti-personnel landmines. When the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Mr. Keizo Obuchi, signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction at Ottawa on 3 December last year, he at the same time pointed out the need for a comprehensive approach under the banner of a "zero victim programme" because "zero victims" must be our real goal.

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Japan will redouble its efforts toward this goal. On a humanitarian side, Japan has decided to extend 10 billion yen (that is, approximately 80 million dollars) over five years for the implementation of the so-called Tokyo Guidelines adopted at the Tokyo Conference last March, which cover mine clearance, development of technologies for mine detection and removal, and assistance to surviving victims.

In the field of regulation of landmines, Foreign Minister Obuchi emphasized at Ottawa the need to start treaty negotiations as early as possible at the Conference on Disarmament here in Geneva, if we are to aim at a universal and effective banning of landmines. Japan is flexible as to whether we pursue the immediate establishment of an ad hoc committee or prepare a negotiating mandate under a special coordinator, but Japan strongly believes that it is indispensable, in order to achieve universal elimination of anti-personnel landmines, that we negotiate a ban on APLs with the participation of the main producers and users which remain outside of the Ottawa treaty. The negotiations in the CD are exactly the steps for this purpose of a universal ban on APLs and thus the endeavours toward the goal of "zero victims". In other words, the work in the CD can be understood as efforts to realize the objective of the elimination of anti-personnel landmines, the objective which the Ottawa treaty itself aspires to. My delegation will continue to appeal to the Conference to start negotiations on APLs as soon as possible.

The Conference on Disarmament is now suffering a lot of criticism. Some even express doubt about the significance of the existence of this Conference itself. Japan, however, continues to regard the CD as one of the most important forums in the field of disarmament. If the CD has the blues, Japan would make all the more effort to cheer it up. Today, I have the pleasure of joining many colleagues in hoping for the revitalization of this Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Japan for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Canada, Ambassador Moher.

Mr. MOHER (Canada): Mr. President, I would like first to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency, and my delegation will of course cooperate fully with you to ensure that the Conference starts its substantive work this year quickly and efficiently. I would also like to welcome on this formal occasion our new colleagues from China, India, Iran, Japan, the Netherlands, Peru, Sri Lanka and our neighbour the United States of America.

This statement is divided into four sections and the first section that I wish to deal with is that of weapons of mass destruction, specifically nuclear.

Canada's position on nuclear disarmament and on the responsibility of the CD has been stated earlier, both here in the CD and elsewhere. Essentially it remains our firm conviction that nuclear disarmament has been and continues to be a primary and priority preoccupation of the global community. Worldwide, there continue to be more than 36,000 nuclear warheads

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on launchers or in storage. While acknowledging progress to date, we remain committed to the promotion of continuing progressive and dynamic steps toward the elimination of these weapons. START I, which is after all the only ratified strategic nuclear weapon reduction treaty being implemented, is not enough. START II must be ratified early in 1998 and a START-III-and-beyond process must be initiated. Other measures can and should be undertaken in parallel.

In pursuing such steps, it is clear that responsibilities and activities of States vary. While we fully acknowledge that the nuclear-weapon States have particular responsibility on nuclear disarmament issues, and thus have specific contributions to make, other members of the international community have both stakes and interests with regard to these issues. These stakes and interests should not be ignored.

We all recognize the CD as the single multilateral forum for consideration and negotiation of arms control and disarmament issues. More specifically, in our view, the CD should and can be appropriately and substantively engaged on nuclear disarmament issues. First, however, let me be very clear. Canada does not consider that the CD should be mandated to negotiate nuclear weapon reductions per se or specific operational issues concerning such weapons. In our view, the START process at this stage is rightly conducted between the United States of America and the Russian Federation. Together with the full and effective implementation of the NPT, the full and effective implementation of the agreements resulting from the START process is key to international efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons worldwide. As already noted, we urge Russian ratification of START II this spring; we welcome the statements of both Governments about START III and we hope that the START process will be widened soon to include all five nuclear-weapon States. However, it is our firm conviction that it would be inappropriate and unhelpful to multilateralize the subject matters of the START process itself.

But the CD should respond to the broad multilateral desire to support, as appropriate, nuclear-weapon States' efforts in the disarmament field. We should find a way so it can be more aware of issues and developments, can express views on developments, and, more directly can identify and explore issues which could be negotiated at an appropriate point by a multilateral mechanism. The CD has negotiated one such issue in the recent past, i.e. the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty; Canada continues to consider that the CD could make a further contribution by the negotiation of an effective fissile material cut-off treaty. Other issues appropriate for negotiation in the CD may well emerge in the future, not least of all as the result of substantive discussions in the CD on general nuclear disarmament issues and developments.

At this point in human history and in the history of this body, it is difficult to understand why this forum, in particular, does not have a mechanism for this purpose. Our views on this matter are well known. We first formally articulated our support for such a mechanism on 12 September 1996. We reiterated our vision for such a mechanism in our

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statement to the CD on 21 January of last year. The text of that proposal is contained in CD/1456 of 15 May of last year. During the extensive debates of 1997, we outlined some of the arguments supporting the proposal.

Appropriate CD consideration of nuclear disarmament would respond to the priority accorded to the issue by the international community. We note that such an idea would follow the precedents set by other ad hoc committees of the CD. The CD has often set up ad hoc committees with mandates to consider matters in a focused and substantive manner, yet not necessarily to negotiate immediately. The Ad Hoc Committee on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space was active for several years, yet its mandate did not include negotiation. The Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments was active from 1993 to 1994 without a negotiating mandate.

We are aware that some members of the CD have suggested that this approach to dealing with the nuclear disarmament issue poses both procedural and substantive problems. We have listened carefully to these comments and would like to address at least some of them now in this early stage in our discussions, in the hope that this might clear the way for practical consideration of our approach.

First, we have heard it said that positive action along the lines suggested by Canada would "convert the CD from a substantive negotiating forum to a talk shop". A better-informed CD in which substantive discussion can take place with a view to identifying one or more particular issues appropriate for negotiation is not a "talk shop". Rather, it would be the fulfilment of precisely the sort of serious role and mandate to which this body should be devoting itself. Moreover, could the CD not, from time to time, express a consensus political viewpoint on particularly timely issues in this field? We think it could - and various possibilities readily suggest themselves if the CD should decide it useful to do so.

Second, it has been said that such a substantive discussion process within the CD would complicate the START process and related activities. But the fact is, both the United States of America and the Russian Federation Governments are already providing extensive information on the START process to their legislatures. Both are answering questions from those bodies and from other sources, including from the media, interested publics, experts and NGOs. Finally, it is clear that under any scenario those Governments - and the other nuclear-weapon States' Governments - would decide for themselves what information to provide. The providing of information to an expert body like the CD would complement these national activities and, indeed, could contribute to developing a considerably better-informed debate at the international level on the complexities, challenges and opportunities for progress on the nuclear disarmament front.

Finally, there is a concern that the establishment by the CD of a mechanism for this purpose would be the first dangerous step on the "slippery slope" towards negotiation in the CD of nuclear weapon reductions and other issues. Let's be serious. We have a deep respect for the ability of States members of this body to, singly and collectively, protect their security

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interests. We would also recall that Canada's proposal explicitly recognizes that any substantive discussion process would have to be carried out subject to the CD's own rules of procedure. Finally, I would note that Canada has not in the past, is not now, and will not in the future suggest a negotiating mandate of the nature that I just outlined.

So, here today, Canada renews its proposal as set out in document CD/1456. We urge the CD to consider the essential core of that proposal - i.e. that the CD move now to proceed to substantive discussion of nuclear disarmament issues with a view to identifying one or more possible issues for multilateral negotiation. In our view, what a mechanism is called in this regard is less important than what it does. To facilitate consideration of our proposal we have requested the secretariat to circulate a brief working paper as an official document of the Conference.

At this point in this formal statement, I would wish to remind this plenary of our intervention last Tuesday concerning the proposal made by South Africa. We welcomed that proposal as a valuable contribution. We indicated our willingness to work with it. We support its consideration in the informal meetings you propose to convene. We renew that response here today.

On a separate but related issue, our views on the potential contribution of an effective FMCT are also well known. We continue to believe that an FMCT, negotiated on the basis of the core mandate contained in the consensus Shannon report (CD/1299), is the only broadly acceptable basis for focused CD work. An ad hoc committee can and should be established to initiate negotiations on that basis. These negotiations will undoubtedly be complex and prolonged so all relevant questions will be fully addressed. To demand answers to those questions a priori is only a pretext for inaction.

That said, developments since 1995, such as the NPT extension, the ongoing START process and the CTBT, have suggested the value of considering further the context in which the core mandate is set. One possibility would be a Presidential statement to be made in the process of a decision to establish an ad hoc committee on FMCT with the core mandate. We have reflected on this idea and we have asked the secretariat to circulate a second working paper under cover of a CD number as a contribution in that regard. We believe that the concepts therein are self-evident but would be prepared to consider them further if the CD should so desire.

I turn now to conventional armaments. For too long the CD has allowed work on conventional armaments to be dormant. We are all too familiar with the problem. We now need to focus on solutions and responses which address the various dimensions and complexities of the problem. We need to approach the issue from at least the following perspectives.

First, excessive build-ups or "modernization competitions" of conventional weapons by States can lead to destabilizing competition and can promote, and in some cases exacerbate, tension between States which may escalate to conflict. Second, illicit arms trafficking affects the internal

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security and socio-economic development of States. Further, we must recognize that in post-conflict situations in many areas of the world, excess weapons circulate freely and cheaply - not only creating local problems but often flowing into neighbouring countries. This further complicates the already difficult tasks of peace-building and reconciliation. We acknowledge that these are complex, interrelated issues requiring multifaceted solutions, and we also, of course, recognize without hesitation the inherent right of all States to self-defence as guaranteed in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

Much work has already been done, or is underway in other settings, on conventional weapons upon which we can and should draw as we consider how the CD might bring its special expertise to bear in addressing this issue. It is our view that the CD can provide a unique focal point for drawing together these various strands and developing a longer-term, global approach to meeting the challenge of the licit and illicit trade in conventional weapons and light arms.

Are we in the CD ready to engage on this question? The CD's Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments in 1993 and 1994 made modest progress. Much work has also been done on transparency in armaments through the three sessions since 1992 of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Conventional Arms. The UNDC contributed in 1996 "Guidelines for international arms transfers ... ". On small arms, the United Nations expert group chaired by Japan's Ambassador Donowaki produced an insightful report last year and further work is to be done by a subsequent panel.

In the past, in this body, Canada has outlined a three-step approach to the first question of excessive build-ups. First, is the realization of specific, formal measures to promote transparency with respect to armaments, such as the United Nations Register.

The Register now has a record of reporting over five years. But contributions to the Register have been erratic. There has been lack of consistency in the data provided. Work to strengthen the Register - for example by including military holdings and procurement through national production - has not produced the results we would have hoped for. This innovative instrument of transparency has not been permitted to play the full role it should in beginning to give the global community a handle on the issue of excessive arms build-ups. We hope that we might still renew and reinvigorate the Register. But given the difficult debate on expansion in the experts group, and the various views expressed on transparency at this past First Committee, it seems to us that comprehensive consideration of these issues in the CD would be useful and timely.

A second step we envisage is consultation among States on the significance of the data and information brought to light by the transparency process. Again, the CD provides a natural, global forum for a coherent discussion of these issues.

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A third element of our approach relates to the key issue of restraint by both exporters and importers to curtail and avoid excessive and destabilizing build-ups of conventional arms. Under this heading, the CD could examine a number of approaches including the possibility of developing guidelines, or a code of conduct respecting arms transfers, including small arms. This sort of measure, arrived at as the result of deliberate consideration and negotiation by this body, would go beyond transparency towards promoting responsibility and restraint. We have models to assist us in this work, including the guidelines for conventional arms transfers adopted by the P-5 in 1991, a copy of which is attached to this statement. The work of the UNDC, reported on in 1996, on guidelines for international arms transfers would also be useful.

As regards the question of illicit arms trafficking, the CD could examine the treaty adopted by OAS in November last year, the "Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials". The highly successful experience of this Mexican-led initiative shows the importance of regional efforts. Indeed, in looking at the question of conventional weapons and small arms, much positive work has been done at the regional level.

We believe we should be inspired by these experiences and see what we might do within this body to articulate, at the global level, the growing recognition of the conventional weapons/small arms challenge and to demonstrate the growing willingness of Governments to address it.

We believe that this range of issues goes beyond that presently identified as falling within the purview of the former Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency in Armaments. Thus, we propose that the CD initiate a discussion process to explore a broader mandate to develop and reflect the growth of concern of the international community on these issues. Much useful work has already been done in other settings. However, a central focal point with global expertise and credibility is missing. The CD, if it is willing, could set itself this role and begin new substantive work on conventional weapons and small arms.

Canada would also like to address briefly another field of interest to this body - that is, disarmament action as regards the domain of outer space. This interest on our part dates back to UNSSOD II at which then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau called for work to ban the development, testing and deployment of all weapons in outer space. This call was reiterated by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1992, who stated that Canada would support and promote multilateral discussions towards that end.

In addressing this topic here today, there are two key points I would like to make. First, our concern is not academic. Currently, over 30 countries are engaged in space-related activities and many more are moving in that direction. Technology continues to evolve as well, providing grounds for both optimism and pessimism. And, most importantly, the briefest of reviews of public information reveals increasing speculation about and advocacy of concepts related to the more far-reaching military uses of outer space. So, as noted, the issue is not academic. But is action timely?

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We think so. We readily acknowledge that there is currently no arms race in outer space. That is not the problem we wish to address. Moreover, we recognize that outer space is already being heavily used for such military purposes as surveillance, intelligence-gathering and communications. We do not propose to roll back that reality. But disarmament is, and should be, about more than rolling back what States have already done once their military establishments have developed core security commitments and invested billions in certain capabilities. Our focus has been and is, accordingly, on the non-weaponization of outer space, i.e. no positioning of actual weapons in outer space. There are related activities of potential interest in this respect, and discussions in this body may well bring those into play, but our current focus, I wish to emphasize, is purely on the specific aspect of non-weaponization.

In our opening statement to the CD last year, we indicated our interest in the negotiation in the CD of a legally binding instrument that would prevent the weaponization of outer space. We expanded on this concept during the thematic debates of the United Nations First Committee this past fall. Indeed, at that time, we expressed our interest in the issue to Sri Lanka and the other co-sponsors of the outer space resolution. We indicated that, while the issue seems to us to be increasingly relevant, we believe that the resolution and, more importantly, the CD's mechanism need to be updated to deal with the current reality. Our vote in favour of that resolution was helped, in part, by the resolution's recognition that the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee needs to be reviewed and updated. We support work to that end.

Canada obviously claims no unique awareness in this regard and realizes fully that others may have different views. At this point, we wish to put this matter before the CD with a view to further discussion and again we have requested the secretariat to circulate a brief working paper as a contribution.

Finally, I wish to turn briefly to various other ideas and suggestions which have been advanced. With regard to work in this Conference on our agenda, our composition and our effective functioning, Canada can readily agree to the appointment of special coordinators to build on the precedents established and the useful work done last year. Canada is also prepared to see other special coordinators appointed to explore the prospects for progress on other topics, subject to clarification as to their mandates. As already noted, we consider that transparency in armaments and outer space should be addressed in this context. We would not object to the reappointment of a special coordinator on anti-personnel landmines on the basis of the same mandate as last year or with a revised, agreed mandate. Security assurances could also be considered if members of this Conference should so wish, although we share many of the reservations expressed in this regard. But we wish to emphasize our strong view that this Conference should do its utmost to address priority and substantive issues and not just follow the path of least resistance. We look forward to working with you, Mr. President, and with our colleagues to facilitate and enhance such work. I want to thank you and my colleagues for bearing with the length of this statement this morning.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Canada for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt, Ambassador Zahran.

Mr. ZAHRAN (Egypt): I wish first to express to you, Ambassador Norberg, the warm congratulations of my delegation on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at the beginning of its 1998 session. It has been our experience that the early stage of the Conference's annual session is always a challenging task for all of us. I am confident that your vast diplomatic skills and leadership will lead us to a smooth start of our work in 1998. I want to assure you of the cooperation of my delegation and to congratulate you for the selection of Stockholm as the Capital of Culture for 1998.

I would like to seize this opportunity to express appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka, who guided the work of the Conference admirably throughout the final part of the 1997 session. Moreover, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the members of the secretariat for all the support they are providing to facilitate the work of the Conference.

I would like also to welcome our new colleagues who have recently joined us at the CD, namely Ambassador Krzysztof Jakubowski of Poland, Ambassador Akira Hayashi of Japan, Ambassador Frank Majoor of the Netherlands, Ambassador Nguyen Quy Binh of Viet Nam, Ambassador Jorge Voto-Bernales of Peru, Ambassador Hewa Palihakkara of Sri Lanka, Ambassador Savitri Kunadi of India, Mr. Robert Grey of the United States of America and Ambassador Li Changhe of China. I would like to express to them all my best wishes for a happy and successful stay in Geneva.

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Structural changes in international security following the end of the cold war have made possible outstanding achievements in disarmament negotiations, arms control and non-proliferation. These developments have allowed the Conference to conclude its negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). However, there is still a need to explore new approaches to address priority disarmament issues and to move away from outmoded nuclear deterrence strategies and doctrines. International public opinion and the majority of States have undertaken numerous initiatives aimed at the total elimination of nuclear weapons, in what is starting to look like a general mobilization for the delegitimization of such weapons and the awakening of a new consciousness of the threat they pose to international peace and security, and indeed to mankind.

From this perspective, we consider the commencement of the preparatory process for the NPT Review Conference in the year 2000 as an important phase

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in which concerted efforts should be made to achieve universality for the NPT and the implementation of all its provisions together with the three decisions and the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review Conference. The delegation of Egypt notes with satisfaction that the first session of the Preparatory Committee recommended to the second session, which will convene in Geneva in May 1998, that a certain amount of time be devoted to a discussion of ways and means to implement the Middle East resolution, and we underscore the special responsibility of the depositary States, especially the nuclear States, as the co-sponsors of that resolution, in its implementation.

I would like to point out that the adoption by consensus of a resolution on the Middle East by the 1995 NPT Conference was a clear expression by the States parties to the Treaty of their concern over the seriousness of the situation in the Middle East resulting from the existence of ambiguous nuclear policies and unsafeguarded nuclear facilities in Israel. This poses a threat to regional and international peace and security and undermines the efforts to devise confidence-building measures, in particular the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region and President Mubarak's initiative on the establishment of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, under which all countries in the region which have not yet done so would simultaneously adhere to the NPT, the BWC and the CWC.

As we all know, the 1997 session of the Conference on Disarmament was not the most successful in terms of the substantive consideration of its agenda items. Political divergences among the CD members on the priorities to be accorded to issues under consideration prevented the Conference from agreeing on a programme of work and from establishing ad hoc committees or other mechanisms on any of the agenda items. In his report to the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, Ambassador Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka, the former President of the Conference on Disarmament, described the 1997 session as "a year of pause and reflection on the specific tasks to be undertaken by the Conference following the end of the cold war" with the aim of "reaching an understanding ... on the issues to be addressed and the basic parameters of the instrument to be negotiated". I hope that, in 1998, the Conference will be in a better position, under your auspicious presidency, to commence its work as early as possible in order to discharge the tasks entrusted to it by the international community and to focus on the issues which reflect the imperatives for disarmament dictated by the changes in the international situation and the balance of interests and priorities of States as reflected in the Final Document of SSOD I. Now that the Conference has succeeded in adopting its agenda at its first plenary meeting on 20 January, under your presidency, the delegation of Egypt proposes that we start consultations on the programme of work with a view to its adoption in accordance with rules 27 and 28 of the rules of procedure. I would like to recall the proposal made by the Group of 21 on the programme of work, as contained in document CD/1462 dated 5 June 1997. The Egyptian delegation considers that this proposal is still valid and we hope, Mr. President, that you will take it into account when we start the informal consultations on the agenda.

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

It is imperative for the Conference on Disarmament to emphasize its ongoing role as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. Therefore, every effort should be made to preserve, strengthen and promote this role.

For my part, I have a few observations to make about the issues that should be considered by the Conference on Disarmament during this session. In the view of my delegation, nuclear disarmament issues must remain at the heart of the CD's work. Making progress on these core issues remains our top priority for the 1998 session. This is the same priority that was reaffirmed in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, SSOD I. The enormous destructive power of nuclear weapons was clearly the message of warning that the report of the Canberra Commission of August 1996 highlighted. The central message was that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence is militarily redundant and pointless. It is therefore indispensable to pursue the objective of general and complete nuclear disarmament. The international community has already concluded conventions banning biological weapons and chemical weapons, but the most striking exception remains nuclear weapons, unquestionably the most devastating of all. Therefore, the highest priority should be accorded to the elimination of those weapons. In this connection, I would like to recall what Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala said on his appointment as ASG in charge of the new United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs when he announced that nuclear disarmament and the question of weapons of mass destruction remained a priority.

The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is an affront and a threat to humanity. Despite successive resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and other international forums, in particular the Non-Aligned Movement, and the provisions of international legal instruments, most notably article VI of the NPT and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice issued on 8 July 1996, nuclear disarmament continues to progress at a very slow pace without a legally binding multilateral instrument for the predictable achievement of complete nuclear disarmament. In this context, I would like to refer to resolution 1996/14 dated 23 August 1996, adopted by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which was distributed in this Conference in document CD/1433. That resolution affirms that weapons of mass destruction, and in particular nuclear weapons, should have no role to play in international relations and thus should be eliminated, and recommends that

(continued in English)

"the relevant international forums, in particular the Conference on Disarmament, should immediately start negotiations on nuclear disarmament to reduce nuclear weapons globally within a phased programme, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons, thus contributing to the enhancement of international peace and security and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and above all the right to life".

(continued in Arabic)

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

We acknowledge the reductions made by certain nuclear-weapon States, namely the United States and the Russian Federation. However, all nuclear-weapon States without exception, and other countries which possess undeclared nuclear capabilities, have yet to commit themselves to the ultimate goal of eliminating these weapons in a predictable fashion. They have an ongoing responsibility to demonstrate their good faith and their determination to pursue general and complete disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, under strict and effective international control. To achieve this objective, much work needs to be done at the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. We regret in particular the viewpoint expressed during the 1997 session of the Conference on Disarmament that nuclear weapons should be handled exclusively by those States which officially possess them. This viewpoint stands in stark contradiction with the decision on "Principles and objectives" of the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference and seems to indicate that the States possessing nuclear weapons still believe that these weapons have a role to play in international relations. If nuclear disarmament is to be the exclusive concern of the five nuclear-weapon States, how do we deal with those nuclear weapons that might be possessed by other States which are not parties to the NPT?

By the same token, we are concerned by the lack of implementation of article VI of the NPT, which stipulated, when it was signed in 1968, that the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament would take place at an early date. This objective has not been attained 30 years after the signing of the NPT, and we do not know when that early date is going to be. Taking all this into consideration, Egypt has contributed to the drafting of numerous proposals by the Group of 21 for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament within the context of the Conference on Disarmament, including a programme of action for the elimination of nuclear weapons which Egypt submitted on 8 August 1996 to the Conference on Disarmament on behalf of 28 States members of the Conference, as contained in document CD/1419. We still believe that this and other programmes should be seriously studied in the ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, the establishment of which as a subsidiary body of the Conference on Disarmament was called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/38 L. Egypt has further proposed, in document CD/1453 dated 1 April 1997, a possible mandate for the ad hoc committee which takes into account the various positions of the member States and is calling for simultaneous negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons as well as a comprehensive agreement banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, as envisaged in paragraph 4 of the decision on "Principles and objectives" of the 1995 NPT Conference.

I would like to recall in this connection the proposal made by 26 States members of the Group of 21, including Egypt, in CD/1453. The proposal of South Africa presented to the CD plenary held on 20 January 1998, two days ago is a further attempt to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament which deserves our attention. We hope that priority will be accorded to the consideration of all these proposals during the 1998 session of the Conference. The most important thing is that the political will should be

(Mr. Zahran, Egypt)

present, especially among the nuclear-weapon States, to agree on the establishment of this committee so that we can all sit down together and draft its mandate, taking into consideration all the proposals that have been submitted. The most important thing is to agree on the principle of the creation of this committee.

With regard to security assurances, the best and most comprehensive nuclear security assurance will be for the international community to reach the stage of achievement of a world free from nuclear weapons. Until we fulfill this dream, in order to save mankind from the nightmare of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under the present discriminatory regime of the NPT, non-nuclear-weapon States are in dire need of legally binding security assurances. Needless to say, these assurances should be negotiated in a binding contractual instrument, and this Conference is the competent forum for that. I say this because the negative security assurances that have been given, unilaterally or collectively, by the five nuclear-weapon States and which are referred to in Security Council resolution 984 fall short of the security requirements of the non-nuclear-weapon States since they are conditional, non-comprehensive and not legally binding and have not been negotiated multilaterally in this forum. Hence, the decision on "Principles and objectives" adopted by the NPT Review Conference should be implemented by initiating serious negotiations on a multilateral and legally binding instrument to provide non-nuclear-weapon States with such comprehensive assurances as soon as possible. To this end, the Conference on Disarmament should establish during this 1998 session an ad hoc committee on nuclear security assurances to implement General Assembly resolution 52/36 which was adopted without opposition and which recommends that the Conference on Disarmament should continue intensive negotiations with a view to reaching early agreement and concluding effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The delegation of Egypt does not think that the appointment of a special coordinator is necessary for the establishment of that committee, which, in our view, should be established rapidly to continue the deliberations on this issue that were begun at the previous sessions of this Conference.

Egypt's delegation welcomes the positive views expressed during the 1997 session of the Conference on Disarmament concerning the issue of prevention of an arms race in outer space. In its resolution 52/37 the General Assembly called upon all States, in particular those with major space capabilities, to contribute actively to the objective of the peaceful use of outer space and of the prevention of an arms race in outer space as well as to refrain from actions contrary to that objective, i.e. actions that may lead to its militarization. This resolution also invited the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on this issue and to update its mandate, with a view to beginning negotiations on the conclusion of an agreement or agreements on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects. The delegation of Egypt does not feel that there is a need to appoint a special coordinator to conduct consultations on that question, on the discussion of which progress was made in the Ad Hoc Committee established by the Conference at its previous session.

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Egypt believes that the issue of transparency in armaments must be dealt with as a comprehensive and non-discriminatory confidence-building measure in such a way as to cover all kinds of arms. Egypt regrets that all the efforts to expand the scope of the United Nations Register have not produced the desired results. The Register remains limited to annual notification of transfers of seven categories of conventional arms and continues to disregard other types of conventional arms as well as weapons of mass destruction and advanced technologies with military applications. Furthermore, it does not cover military holdings and procurement through national production. This is why Egypt submitted to the fifty-second session of the General Assembly a draft resolution on transparency in weapons of mass destruction, which was adopted as resolution 52/38 B. That resolution highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure full transparency in all types of armaments. We believe that consideration of the various aspects of transparency in armaments during the 1998 session of the Conference is important in order to reconcile the differing viewpoints and address the concerns of all States, including those not participating in the Register. This could be achieved by appointing a special coordinator, and, in this regard, we stress the need to appoint a special coordinator to conduct consultations on this issue in order to propose a negotiating mandate for an ad hoc committee on that subject. We agree with what Ambassador Moher of Canada said in his statement. The programme of work that was submitted by the Group of 21 in 1997 also proposed the appointment of a special coordinator to conduct consultations on that issue.

Egypt is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, with about 23 million landmines planted in its soil by foreign Powers during the Second World War and the Middle East conflict. The elimination and clearance of these mines is a matter of the highest priority to Egypt in order to provide the necessary security for its civilian population and eliminate a serious obstacle which is hindering the implementation of numerous economic and social development plans. The States which planted those mines should assume full responsibility for their clearance.

Egypt is aware of the magnitude and severity of the problems related to the proliferation of anti-personnel landmines in the world and in particular in Africa, which constitutes a primarily humanitarian issue. However, we believe that measures aiming at banning landmines should be accompanied by serious and tangible steps to clear mines from the territory of affected countries, particularly those which are unable to achieve this objective on their own. It is essential to meet the financial and technical requirements therefor and to transfer of appropriate advanced technology to help these countries to overcome that chronic problem. In this connection, I would like to refer to the final declaration of the CCW Review Conference held in Geneva in 1996, which incorporated a paragraph on the role of States responsible for the deployment of mines in the process of their clearance, which reads:

> "Recognizing the important role that the international community, particularly States involved in the deployment of mines, can play in assisting in mine clearance in affected countries through the provision

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of necessary maps and information and appropriate technical and material assistance to remove or otherwise render ineffective existing minefields, mines and booby-traps".

This position has been supported by a resolution adopted in June 1997 by the OAU Summit in Harare on this issue.

It is with this in mind that Egypt participated as an observer throughout the Ottawa Process. Regrettably the final text adopted at Oslo contains vague provisions on mine clearance and no reference at all to the responsibility of States involved in the deployment of mines. In addition, it disregards exceptions to accommodate security concerns of States and their legitimate right of self-defence enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly in the case of States with long borders passing through uninhabited areas, such as Egypt. Such exceptions are necessary in order to combat illicit smuggling of drugs and weapons intended to undermine the national security and stability of these States, through the spread of terrorist and criminal activities across the borders.

I conclude by expressing our sincere hope that this Conference will start its 1998 session with a renewed sense of commitment to engage in meaningful and substantive work, thereby assuming its full responsibilities as the sole negotiating forum for disarmament issues. It is our collective responsibility as member States to contribute to the success of the Conference on Disarmament at this historic juncture, when we stand on the threshold of a new century and a third millennium, by according priority to the achievement of a world free of all weapons of mass destruction under effective international control. This is why we believe we have to promptly adopt the programme of work of the Conference so that we can make optimum use of the time available during this session to achieve progress on the disarmament agenda.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Egypt for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. The next speaker on my list is the representative of Belgium, Ambassador Mernier.

Mr. MERNIER (Belgium) (translated from French): Mr. President, allow me to begin by telling you how pleased my delegation is to see you taking up the role of President of our Conference at the beginning of this year 1998. Each of the delegations present here is aware of the importance of the task awaiting you and your responsibilities. The successes achieved by the Conference on Disarmament in recent years have been significant and have conferred upon it very special credibility. However, this stock of goodwill is neither inexhaustible or everlasting. Following a year of reflection, it is important for us to get back onto the road to success. It is important for us to stop paralysing ourselves by a fruitless confrontation of maximalist positions and obscure procedural quarrels. If we are to get back onto the road to success, first of all we must find the necessary political will to define our objectives and the strategy enabling us to attain them. While it is certainly always possible to improve our methods of work, it is not their imperfections which account for the stagnation of our work for more than a

(Mr. Mernier, Belgium)

year. It is not our procedures that are in question but the vision that we have or have not got of the mission entrusted to us by the international community. Certainly the most important element in this mission is the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Among them, nuclear weapons quite clearly occupy the first place. The variety of means of delivery, the number of warheads, but particularly the sophistication of these weapons and their destructive potential are enough to explain this pre-eminence. The subject of my statement today is precisely and solely the nuclear issue. Of course this question is not the only one which demands our attention; my delegation's interest in anti-personnel mines, for example, is well known.

First of all, on the subject of nuclear non-proliferation, our priority is still a treaty banning fissile materials for military purposes for which - need I recall? - a mandate exists which should have enabled us to start these important negotiations quickly. As to the dismantling of nuclear weapons, I would like to recapitulate the position of my delegation briefly. At present, as far as nuclear matters are concerned, there are two super-Powers with oversized arsenals beyond comparison with those of the other nuclear Powers. These two super-Powers have for many years been conducting slow, complex but productive negotiations about the mutual and verified reduction of their arsenals. My country cannot but welcome the genuine successes achieved in the INF, START 1 and START 2 treaties. We firmly hope also that the START 3 negotiations will begin without delay and will be completed speedily. The successes that have been achieved, the existential dimension of what is at stake for the protagonists, the demands for mutual verification naturally mean that the negotiation of such agreements should be reserved for those who are in possession of the weapons being discussed. Belgium does not believe that shifting the process currently under way to a multilateral context would serve the cause of nuclear disarmament. On the contrary, a proliferation of participants, difficulties in defining new and inevitably cumbersome procedures would only hold back and block the regular progress which we can reasonably hope for in the future. The multilateralization of disarmament is an illusion today, and it is a dangerous one. Similarly, we think it is unrealistic to set a timetable for the dismantling of nuclear weapons, which must necessarily be placed in a long-term context which is by definition hard to predict. Merely drawing up such a timetable would require interminable negotiations during which nothing practical would be done. Here again, this is an illusion which wisdom and simple common sense should lead us to abandon. My country's position has thus not changed since the important changes in the international context have given nuclear issues new urgency.

Nuclear matters are still of concern for everybody because there is no doubt that they harbour a potential danger for everybody. The existence of these weapons, their persistence and the efforts being made to get rid of them concern the whole of the international community, and we think that this gives the international community certain rights. The most important of these rights is the right to information. In this respect the present situation is unsatisfactory. There is no reliable, regular mechanism enabling all the countries concerned - that is, everyone - to receive credible information from the nuclear Powers concerning the reduction of their arsenals, the difficulties encountered and the future which is taking shape. In nuclear

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matters, more than in other disarmament matters, only transparency can promote confidence. We do not think it is unrealistic to believe that the Conference on Disarmament might, following in-depth consultations, establish such a system of transparency structured around concrete measures likely to create confidence, even though it is vital that such a system should not have an adverse impact on the bilateral negotiations.

In this context, the statement made by Ambassador Selebi during our plenary meeting last Tuesday seems to us to be of great interest. It represents a positive development that opens up prospects which it would be unreasonable not to explore. As drafted, the South African proposal is likely to enable us to open a new dialogue. For all these reasons, my delegation welcomes the South African initiative. We will study the implications and the possibilities it offers in an open-minded way, without of course contradicting our own fundamental positions which I have just outlined.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Belgium for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland, Ambassador Anderson.

Ms. ANDERSON (Ireland): I congratulate you on your assumption of office. I also appreciate the efforts you have made to achieve a rapid start to substantive work in the 1998 CD session.

My reason for taking the floor today is to welcome the South African proposal concerning the possible future work of the CD in the area of nuclear disarmament. It is encouraging that we should have been presented with such an important and carefully elaborated initiative at our first plenary.

I should also like to acknowledge the thoughtful statement of the Ambassador of Myanmar at Tuesday's plenary, in which he indicated flexibility on the issue of how the CD might consider nuclear disarmament issues.

My delegation takes it as incontrovertible that achievement of the goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons will, at some stage, require multilateral negotiations.

We fully acknowledge the importance of the bilateral negotiations between the United States and Russia on the progressive reduction in their stockpiles of nuclear weapons. We congratulate them on the significant progress which has been made and we note the agenda for future negotiations. We can fully appreciate why they would not wish to multilateralize their complex discussions.

Understandably, however, such bilateral processes are primarily focused on reductions. While they are important stepping stones on the way to elimination, they are not in themselves focused on achieving the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Indeed, it would be impossible for two nuclear Powers or even five nuclear Powers to negotiate between themselves the global elimination of nuclear weapons. Global outcomes inevitably require multilateral approaches.

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If the elimination of nuclear weapons will eventually require a multilateral agreement, questions of timing and substance arise. At what point should the international community, taking account of the progress made in bilateral nuclear arms negotiations and in view of a relatively benign international security situation, begin to consider the scope, content and timing of multilateral negotiations on the elimination of nuclear weapons?

It seems to us that the South African proposal asks us to assess if now is the time to begin to consider these questions. In effect, the proposal invites us to cross the threshold into the antechamber to eventual negotiations on the elimination of nuclear weapons. It asks us to step back from the hitherto relatively narrow focus of nuclear disarmament negotiations and to examine the vista ahead.

When the CD comes to decide in plenary on the South African proposal, after a period of study and reflection, it will be a defining moment.

Let me make clear that Ireland believes that the time has come to take a decisive step forward.

It is certainly right that our ambition should be tempered by the necessary realism. At the same time, "realism" too often risks becoming a code word for inaction, an indefinite postponement of multilateral action until the fruits of bilateralism and plurilateralism become apparent. For our part, we support the kind of balanced accommodation - the determined search for a middle ground - which the South African approach represents.

Last year my delegation expressed its support for the establishment of a mechanism in the CD which would permit us to examine what further multilateral work the CD might usefully undertake in support of the goal of the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. We suggested that such a mechanism could take into account all relevant proposals which have been presented to the CD. Discussions under such a mechanism should not be rhetorical but pragmatic, an effort to agree an agenda of necessary future multilateral work on nuclear disarmament while taking full account of the progress made in the bilateral or plurilateral negotiations between the nuclear Powers.

The history of this body in negotiating disarmament treaties has amply demonstrated the ability of multilateral negotiations to conclude global agreements prohibiting weapons of mass destruction, not least their verification provisions.

Towards the end of the 1997 session we noted some signs of an emerging body of opinion in the CD, cutting across all regional groups, which appeared willing to explore the compromises necessary to make progress on the central issue of nuclear disarmament. And indeed, the various interventions we have heard this morning absolutely confirm that impression.

The initiative taken by South Africa brings us closer to developing a more precise map of this common ground. In our view, the proposal has the

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potential to bring us to a reasonable compromise which could open the way to the launching of negotiations on those key issues of nuclear disarmament which might appropriately be dealt with by the CD.

A phrase in Ambassador Selebi's statement which particularly struck us was his reference to "a crossroads of relevance".

The CD is indeed at a crossroads of relevance. Many of the proposals for CD work in 1998 which are under discussion are worthy and important. However, it is debatable whether some of these work programme suggestions require or justify the existence of what amounts to a standing Conference with its own secretariat. Arguably, a number of these issues could more appropriately be taken up in ad hoc formations convened sporadically.

It seems to us that an important test of the CD's continuing relevance is its willingness to begin to deal with the question of what contribution it might make in the future to negotiations on the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. The coming weeks will be crucial. We hope it will prove possible to have a reasoned and constructive debate leading to a positive outcome.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Ireland for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico, Ambassador de Icaza.

Mr. de ICAZA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's approval at seeing you conduct our work. Your efforts have already, at this early stage of our annual session, led to the adoption of the agenda of the Conference. You may count on the support and cooperation of the delegation of Mexico. I also wish to extend a very heartfelt welcome to our new colleagues, Ambassadors Kunadi of India, Voto-Bernales of Peru, Grey of the United States, Palihakkara of Sri Lanka, Binh of Viet Nam and Khorram of Iran, as well as the Ambassador of Chile.

There is no greater danger for the security of all States than the continuing danger represented by huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons. All the reductions that have been agreed between the two main possessors of such weapons and those to be reached in the future are welcome. But as long as just one of these devices continues to exist, the fate of mankind will be in the balance. The prohibition of nuclear weapons is an imperative obligation incumbent on all States, as the International Court of Justice has stated in categorical terms.

In resolution 52/38 L the United Nations General Assembly recognizes that the time is now opportune for the undertaking of effective disarmament measures with a view to their total elimination within a time-bound framework. The General Assembly reiterated its call upon our Conference to establish, on a priority basis, an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament to commence negotiations early in 1998 on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament. This

(Mr. de Icaza, Mexico)

is the international community's highest priority, to which we will have to devote the best of our efforts, intelligence and negotiating will, however long and difficult the road might appear.

My delegation has taken note with interest of the proposal that was made just two days ago by the distinguished representative of South Africa, Ambassador Selebi. We welcome this initiative because in its terms and in its spirit it is designed to foster dialogue on the steps that should be taken with a view to the progressive elimination of nuclear weapons. We reserve the right to propose in due course one or two adjustments to the wording of the negotiating mandate of the ad hoc committee being proposed by South Africa. For now we are awaiting the reactions that will doubtless continue to be prompted by this very interesting and very positive proposal.

The priority that Mexico, along with the overwhelming majority of countries, attaches to nuclear disarmament in no way signifies or can be construed to mean that we are establishing any link or precondition for agreeing to a programme of substantive work, or that one item on our agenda could keep all the others hostage. There cannot be any linkage when our own experience in the Conference shows that a negotiating process starts when we are ready for it, that is to say, at the moment when the security perceptions of all parties lead us naturally to undertake negotiations that mean genuine progress towards the goal of general and complete disarmament.

As early as 1978, when the priority of nuclear disarmament was established, the importance of undertaking negotiations designed to bring about a balanced reduction in conventional weapons was also expressed. We recognized then that negotiations should be undertaken on limiting international transfers of such weapons. Both principles are reflected in the various documents that give meaning to the work of this Conference, such as the one proposed by Mexico in the context of the subject of the comprehensive programme of disarmament. Conventional disarmament has been and will continue to be the subject of concern and deliberation by the international community.

As we said at the last General Assembly, one of the paradoxes of this time of détente is the excessive availability, accumulation and transfer of conventional weapons, especially small and light weapons. The dangers arising from links between these weapons and organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism in all its forms affect the security of all States.

The uncontrolled proliferation of small arms has many causes and their effects are uneven because, to a large extent, they depend on the various regional contexts. It is nevertheless a fact that the many initiatives that have been taken in various forums testify to growing concern in the international community about the production of and illicit trafficking in small arms. Organized public opinion has taken a stand and has initiated a campaign to seek ways and means to regulate this trade. Last month in Washington there was a meeting of non-governmental organizations in which it was emphasized that a universal system to control this deadly trade, though needed, does not yet exist.

(Mr. de Icaza, Mexico)

On 13 and 14 November 1997, at the headquarters of the Organization of American States, in the presence of the heads of State of Mexico and the United States, and as a result of an initiative by the President of Mexico, Dr. Ernesto Zedillo, 29 countries signed the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. In drawing up the treaty, account was taken of the abundant literature produced in recent years, especially the Disarmament Commission's guidelines for international arms transfers. As a clear example of what can be achieved in this area, my delegation has asked the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament to have the text of this Inter-American Convention distributed as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament. For that purpose I am submitting the Spanish, English and French versions of the text. Naturally, since this is an inter-American convention, the Portuguese version is also available.

Under your able leadership, Mr. President, we have managed, on the very first day of work this year, to adopt an agenda based on the priorities of the international community as far as disarmament is concerned - nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons. Although my delegation does not establish linkages, it is clear that international security, despite its complexity, is a whole and that priorities cannot be disregarded. The lesson to be drawn from the deadlock that affected this Conference during 1997 is clear: the subject of nuclear disarmament must be dealt with meaningfully and methodically on the basis of an unequivocal commitment to the total prohibition of nuclear weapons. Hence the importance of starting a process of consultations on proposals which, like the South African proposal, offer prospects for convergence. Simultaneously, let us explore the possibility of bringing about a worldwide agreement to combat and eliminate the illicit traffic in firearms, explosive devices and related materials, an area where "the United Nations, in keeping with its overall purposes and principles, has a legitimate interest in the field of arms transfers, recognized by the Charter, which refers specifically to the importance of the regulation of armaments for the maintenance of international peace and security".

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Mexico for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, Mr. Acuña.

Mr. ACUÑA (Chile) (translated from Spanish): First of all, Sir, allow me on behalf of my delegation to congratulate you on taking the Chair and to offer you our full cooperation during your term of office. We are sure that the Conference on Disarmament will benefit greatly from your knowledge and experience in the special circumstances involved in the beginning of a new year of work. Likewise, we thank your predecessor, the distinguished Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke of Sri Lanka, for his endeavours, and at the same time we extend a warm welcome to the new ambassadors and members of delegations.

My delegation wishes to refer to the statement made by the distinguished representative of South Africa at the last plenary meeting of the Conference,

(Mr. Acuña, Chile)

and specifically in connection with the proposal that he made concerning a draft decision to establish an ad hoc committee for nuclear disarmament. The delegation of Chile welcomes this proposal and wishes to express support for it on this occasion, because we consider it is broad and balanced. This is an initiative designed to promote achievement of the goal of nuclear disarmament in terms that leave room, within this multilateral negotiating forum, for the possible start of a fruitful, concrete and universal discussion. It is a proposal that would make it possible in this forum to address the interests of the entire international community as well as the obligations arising out of international treaties that have been signed by a large number of its members. Consequently we think this is a proposal whose content deserves careful analysis. It offers us a realistic and flexible approach which, in view of the current circumstances in the Conference on Disarmament, is the most appropriate one to deal with a subject that is of the greatest importance. For Chile, nuclear disarmament is a priority issue on the agenda of the CD, and we believe that the decision to set up an ad hoc committee with a mandate such as that proposed would enable us to tackle it in a constructive way. The draft that has been presented to us by South Africa thus constitutes an appropriate point of departure for dealing with nuclear disarmament.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Chile for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage?

If that is not the case, I should now like to take up for decision the request from Jamaica to participate in the work of the Conference as an observer. This request is contained in document CD/WP.492, which is before you. I take it that this request is acceptable to the Conference?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? If that is not the case, this concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 27 January 1998, at 10 a.m.

Immediately after adjourning this meeting, I shall convene the informal open-ended consultations.

The meeting rose at 12 noon.